

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION ARA-14

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S E C R E T BELIZE 67

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, BH
SUBJECT: CONSULTATION WITH BELIZEAN PEOPLE ON SETTLEMENT OF
DISPUTE

REF: A) STATE 18348 B) 77 BELIZE 0249

1. PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY PREMIER PRICE AND FOREIGN SECRETARY
OWEN SEEM TO HAVE MADE QUESTIONS RAISED IN REF A SOMEWHAT ACADEMIC;
NEVERTHELESS, I SHALL ATTEMPT TO ANSWER THEM AS BEST I CAN IN
THE HOPE THAT CURRENT EFFORT TO SETTLE DISPUTE IS NOT AS DEAD
AS IT NOW LOOKS.

2. POSSIBLE MEANS OF EFFECTING PROMISED CONSULTATION OF BELIZEAN
PEOPLE WOULD SEEM TO INCLUDE:

A. LEAVING MATTER TO PREMIER AND HIS GOVERNMENT AS THE ELECTED
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE TO HANDLE AS THEY SEE FIT.
THIS IS THE WAY PREMIER PRICE ORIGINALLY HOPED TO HANDLE THE
MATTER BUT IT APPEARS RULED OUT NOW BY HIS REJECTION OF ANY
SETTLEMENT INVOLVING TERRITORIAL CESSION. ALSO,
RESULTS OF BELIZE CITY ELECTIONS CAST DOUBT ON PRICE GOVERN-
MENT'S AUTHORITY FOR MAKING DECISIONS AS MOMENTOUS AS THIS
ONE.

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B. A POSSIBLE SCENARIO MENTIONED TO ME SOME TIME AGO BY
GOVERNOR MCENTEE WOULD INVOLVE A SELLING EFFORT BY AN HMG
CABINET OR SUBCABINET LEVEL OFFICIAL IN THE COURSE OF A
VISIT TO BELIZE. THIS WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO BE FOLLOWED BY
SOME KIND OF REFERRENDUM. PRICE AND BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES
WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO RECOMMEND REJECTION BY VOTERS, BUT

CONCEIVABLY THEY MIGHT REFRAIN FROM ACTIVELY CAMPAIGNING AGAINST SUCH PROPOSALS IF THEY INCLUDED SOME IRRESISTABLY ATTRACTIVE FEATURES. AS TO THE PROBABLE OUTCOME, I STILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE THE BELIZEANS ACCEPTANCE OF ANY PROPOSAL REQUIRING THE CESSION OF BELIZEAN TERRITORY TO GUATEMALA. PERHAPS IF VOTING ON THE ISSUE COULD BE LIMITED TO THE PEOPLE IN THE AREA DIRECTLY AFFECTED, A WAY MIGHT BE FOUND TO GET SOME SEMBLANCE OF LOCAL APPROVAL, BUT THERE IS SOME DOUBT THAT THE REST OF THE COUNTRY WOULD AQUIESCE IN A GEOGRAPHICALLY LIMITED REFERENDUM.

C. SOME SORT OF POLL-TAKING EFFORT BY A BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION OF SOME SORT, E.G. FROM THE UN.

3. FACTORS I BELIEVE WOULD BE MOST INFLUENTIAL IN DETERMINING THE OUTCOME OF SUCH CONSULTATION ARE IN ORDER OF THEIR IMPORTANCE:

A. SECURITY - EXTENT TO WHICH GUATEMALAN THREAT WOULD BE REDUCED, E.G., BY SOME SORT OF CONTINUED U.K. MILITARY PRESENCE OR JOINT GUARANTEE BY U.S., U.K., MEXICO, AND CANADA.

B. NATIONAL PRIDE - EXTENT TO WHICH PUTATIVE PROPOSALS WOULD OFFEND BELIZEAN NATIONALISM, A MAJOR INGREDIENT OF WHICH IS ANTIPATHY TOWARD GUATEMALA AND THE BRUTAL AUTHORITARIANISM ITS GOVERNMENT IS SEEN TO EPITOMIZE.

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C. ECONOMIC BETTERMENT - BELIZEANS WOULD NOT BE UNRECEPTIVE TO INDUCEMENTS WHICH MIGHT RAISE THEIR STANDARD OF LIVING, E.G. AN AID PROGRAM, AN IMPROVED ROAD SYSTEM, ACCESS TO NEW SOURCES OF DEVELOPMENT CAPITAL.

D. THE DESIRE FOR INDEPENDENCE - THIS IS BY FAR THE LEAST COMPELLING OF ALL CONSIDERATIONS. THOUGH POSSESSED OF NORMAL NATIONALISTIC FEELINGS, THE BELIZEAN PEOPLE ARE NOT ESPECIALLY ANXIOUS TO ACHIEVE INDEPENDENCE. PARA 6 OF REFERENCE B STILL ACCURATELY REPRESENTS MY ASSESSMENT OF THE PREDOMINANT ATTITUDE OF BELIZEANS TOWARD INDEPENDENCE. IF CESSION OF PART OF THEIR TERRITORY WERE TO BE PART OF THE PRICE OF INDEPENDENCE MOST OF THEM WOULD RATHER LEAVE THINGS THE WAY THEY ARE NOW.

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